



Below: The Taffetas — left to right, Angela Baldino, Teresa Lawrence, back, Jolin Milberg, front, and Leslie Irene Gale — rehearse “A Taffeta Christmas” at the Decker Theatre at Clark College.



Photos for photo  
illustration by  
**STEVEN LANE**  
The Columbian



# Share a tuneful holiday with real material girls

'A Taffeta

By **BRETT OPPEGAARD**  
*Columbian staff writer*

Christmas':

Through the whims and whirls of New York theater, Rick Lewis learned quickly how one could prosper and plummet.

Hit revue's

He gave up a role in a Broadway musical, "Sunday in the Park with George," that later won a Pulitzer Prize, for a bigger part in a London show that folded before it even reached the stage. Opportunities suddenly disappeared, and the pianist found himself working a temporary job in a bank. Frustrated, he decided to take one more shot at the top level of theater, so he developed a 1950s musical revue called "The Taffetas." He then drained his bank account in the mid-1980s, found a couple of investors and put on a show.



**Rick Lewis**  
Pianist developed  
musical revue

yule version

comes to

Decker Theatre

The New York Times wrote a positive review, saying the piece had "a bright future," Lewis recalls. His answering machine was filled with

## If you go

- **What:** "A Taffeta Christmas" by Public Playhouse.
- **When:** 7:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays, starting Friday and continuing through Dec. 23.
- **Where:** Clark

College's Decker Theatre, inside the Frost Arts Center, 1800 E. McLoughlin Blvd.

■ **Cost:** \$16, \$14 for senior citizens and students.

■ **Information:** 360-573-4984.

■ **On the Web:** [www.publicplayhouse.org](http://www.publicplayhouse.org).

**Jolin Milberg, right, with the other Taffetas.**



# Theater:

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messages the next day from people throughout the country who wanted to read it.

"The Taffetas" has become Lewis' signature work. It has been produced more than 500 times by companies throughout the nation, he says, plus a German theater that translated it and performed "The Taffetas" for three years straight. A major casino in Las Vegas is expected to open a version of the piece next year, and a national tour is planned for 2008.

"The Taffetas" has become so successful that Lewis, who moved from New York to Vancouver, also put together a holiday version, "A Taffeta Christmas," which will be performed by Vancouver's newest company, Public Playhouse, starting Friday at Clark College's Decker Theatre.

The plotless musical revue, which features about 50 songs, shows the ultra-sweet Taffeta sisters after they have had their big break, returning to their hometown of Muncie, Ind., for a televised concert.

Lewis has created new arrangements of the tunes for this local production and added the song "I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas." The 50-year-old considers this effort the start of the major retooling process that he plans for the piece early next year.

## Playhouse in Vancouver

Public Playhouse was founded by a couple from San Jose, Calif., Jolin and Dustin Milberg, and they are hoping "A Taffeta Christmas" can become their first hit.

Both were trained in the performing arts in college and had stints in professional companies. Dustin now works in information technology, while Jolin, a former elementary school teacher, runs the theater company.

The troupe's first show, "Imaginary Invalid," in downtown Vancouver's Columbia Arts Center, attracted an average of 40 people per performance during a weekend in May, Jolin Milberg said. The

second, "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)," roughly doubled that number of patrons over three weeks, but it also was offered in a trendy district of downtown Portland, at Coho Theater, in September.

Milberg says the group needs to find a permanent home, and that she would prefer downtown Vancouver. Yet she's having trouble finding space that can be converted into a 99-seat theater with enough available parking.

Milberg said she saw "The Taffetas" in San Jose and decided to do the Christmas version before she learned Lewis lived in this area. Sylvia's Class Act Dinner Theatre, of Portland, was the first to produce "The Taffetas" locally, in 1998.

Lewis also directed both of the Taffeta shows for the Broadway Rose Theatre Company in Tigard, Ore., in 2000. Longview Stageworks, that city's top professional company, produced "The Taffetas" two years ago with the same director who will lead Public Playhouse in the holiday version this time, Ron Daum.

## Taffetas meet Cardigans

After reworking "A Taffeta Christmas," Lewis said he plans to start another project that combines "The Taffetas" with his all-male spinoff "The Cardigans — Those Swingin' Singin' Guys From Alpha Mu Phi Pi." In the new show, he's envisioning the Taffeta sisters marrying the Cardigan brothers and the scenarios that might come from such a collaboration.

Besides featuring memorable pop music from the era, Lewis said, "The Taffetas" has done well as a concept because of the unwavering optimism of the characters and the sweetness of the world they inhabit, which takes the audience away from the troubles of the day.

"Everybody is always looking for something that makes them feel like Christmas when they were young," Lewis said. "This, I think, takes you to that Christmas place."

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